

THE Baptist Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION SINCE 1877

BRIEFS

MEASURE TO PROVIDE RELIEF IN IRAQ, SYRIA

WASHINGTON, D.C. (BP) — The U.S. House of Representatives on Nov. 27 approved without opposition the Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act, H.R. 390, and sent it to U.S. President Donald Trump for his approval. The U.S. Senate passed the bill in October, also without opposition. If signed into law by Trump, the measure will make humanitarian aid available to religious and ethnic minorities in the two Middle East countries including Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims. The bill would also provide support for criminal investigations and prosecutions of terrorists responsible for genocidal acts and crimes against humanity.

NBC: PLAN NEAR TO RESTORE DEAD SEA

DEAD SEA, Israel (BP) — The Dead Sea has been receding for decades with some experts predicting its total demise by 2050, but a \$1.5 billion plan to resurrect the biblically-prominent body of water is nearing fruition, NBC News reported Nov. 29. Meetings are expected within weeks to finalize a plan considered for two decades to build a desalination facility in Jordan to essentially remove salty brine from the Red Sea and pump it into the Dead Sea, NBC said.

TAIWAN VOTERS STICK TO MARRIAGE VALUES

TAIPEI, Taiwan (BP) — Referenda supporting marriage between one man and one woman passed overwhelmingly during Nov. 24 elections in Taiwan. The votes appeared to show that most citizens still hold to traditional values even though the country's highest court moved toward legalizing same sex marriage in 2017. The main question of whether Taiwan Civil Code should continue to define marriage as the union between one man and one woman received more than 7.6 million "yes" votes, compared to 2.9 million voting "no." Referenda need 4.94 million votes — a quarter of eligible voters — to be considered by the government.



LIFE TURNAROUND — Larry Pepper was a NASA flight surgeon and astronaut candidate before God put him on a different trajectory — working with the IMB at hospitals in Africa. (IMB photo)

Peppers fly high with Christ

AFRICA (BP and local reports) — Larry Pepper thought he had been open to God's leading. He had been praying through the missions book, Operation World, and he had been thinking more about his impact on eternity as he sat in church every Sunday.

One day the words came clear as a bell right where he sat in Houston, Texas: "You've committed everything to Me except your job." Larry knew the thought had come from God. He took a deep breath, and he told God to put

him and his family wherever He wanted them to be.

"I was beginning to see the world through God's eyes in terms of lostness," he said. "For me, that meant seeing if I could use my medical skills in a way that had more Kingdom impact."

Larry's work was his dream job. He was a flight surgeon for NASA, providing medical care for pilots and crewmembers. However, it soon became evident that God was drawing him to walk away and move his family to

serve with the International Mission Board (IMB) in Africa.

To step out in obedience, he had to make major sacrifices. For one, he had been selected as a finalist candidate for astronaut duty in space. That was hard to give up.

His wife Sally had some reservations too. "For me, the hardest part was just wrestling with the fears that kept creeping back in — mostly the fear of homeschooling

see PEPPER on p. 7

Ring in your ears? This might be to blame

DURHAM, N.C. (BP and local reports) — Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear thinks Southern Baptists can exceed their \$160 million goal for this year's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) for International Missions.

So, the senior pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, N.C., is daring Paul Chitwood, the newly-installed president of Southern Baptists' International Mission Board (IMB) in Richmond, Va., to a sing-off if the challenge goal of \$170 million is met.

The duet with Chitwood was the top vote-getter in a Twitter poll by IMB, to which Chitwood tweeted that the unlikely vocal pair should sing a song by Milli Vanilli, the rhythm and blues duo that became infamous for lip-syncing instead of performing live.

"Rest assured," Chitwood told Baptist Press, "the only singing [that] Southern Baptists want to hear Paul Chitwood do is Milli Vanilli lip-sync style."

The largest LMCO ever received was \$165.8 million. The offering helps fund more than 3,600 IMB missionaries serving across the globe. One hundred percent of the total each year goes directly to mission fields.

Your gifts
transform lives.

imb

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS | DEC. 2-9
2018 GOAL | \$160,000,000

BOOKSHELF CAR-RT LOT-0019
#0000 2811 2057# 5839 P1
005 DTM
005 DTM
SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOC
505 COMMERCE ST. 401
NASHVILLE TN 37203-3620



From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

A symbol of our own

Symbols are powerful objects to people, and always have been. From the beginnings of human history when people piled stones one upon the other to mark significant places and events, to the Colossus of Rhodes, to the World Trade Towers, symbols compel us to remember the past, move us to action in the present, and give us hope for a bright future.

Great movements have almost always included important symbols. Who can forget Lady Liberty in Tiananmen Square, or our own Statue of Liberty on which Lady Liberty was based? The Great Seal of the United States, with its bald eagle clutching among its talons both arrows for war and olive branches for peace, is recognized all over the world. (A trivia question: In which direction does the eagle's head face? Answer: To the right toward the olive branches, to symbolize the nation's preference for peace.)

Symbols have of course been misused through the ages, too. The swastika, for over 3,000 years the symbol of good luck in many cultures around the world, was adopted by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in the 1930s to capture the essence of their ruinous march toward war and mass murder. It has never recovered its original meaning.

Christians have their symbols, too, the most consequential being the cross upon which our Lord and Savior died to save each one of us. Scholars and other folks have argued for many years (and continue to do so) over the exact composition and configuration of the cross, but its influence and meaning to billions of people over the past 2,000 years is not arguable.

If Southern Baptists have a symbol to call our own, it would be the image of Lottie Moon and the ideals she embodied. One of the first Southern Baptist missionaries to be commissioned to China in 1873, her passion for helping bring lost souls to salvation in that country is legendary even to non-Southern Baptist Christians.

Lottie lived among the Chinese people for 40 years. She was known far and wide, by both friend and foe alike, as the Heavenly Book Visitor because of her unshakable faith in and firm reliance upon the Bible. She loved the Chinese people with all her heart — especially the women and children.

She loved them so much that, when the time came, she was willing to lay down her life for them. Famine came to China, and she was so committed to the people that she gave away all her money and food so others could eat. Finally, on a ship in the harbor of Kobe, Japan, that was returning her to America, she died of malnutrition on Christmas Eve of 1912. She weighed 50 pounds.



The world little noted her life and passing, but Southern Baptists have never forgotten her. Her spiritual passion and personal sacrifice for the cause of Christ has come to symbolize our dedication to helping fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Her selflessness epitomizes for us the image of Christ in ourselves,

and calls us to be as single-minded as Lottie when it comes to the prospect of helping to bring the world to Jesus.

It is fitting that Lottie Moon has become such a powerful symbol for Southern Baptists. She dedicated her life to others and eventually died for them. How much closer to the model of Jesus could any one of us get?

As the December emphasis for this year's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions kicks into high gear and we all seek the Lord's guidance on the amount we will give, know that every penny of the offering goes directly to the field to support the Southern Baptists who are there, just as Lottie was there all those many years ago. Let us hold high the symbol of Lottie not only as we give of our resources, but as we also give of our lives to help save the world.

Most importantly, let us hold Jesus Christ highest of all. Lottie wouldn't want it any other way.

The present identity crisis

Man has been plagued with 'he desire to play God since Genesis 3. This includes promoting "image" self rather than "imago Dei." That is, culture is obsessed with representing self, according to one's own design.

Although the created has always sinfully desired to be the Creator, contemporary culture is fraught with heightened forms of creating one's identity.

Online avatars permit us to create a virtual self where visual appearance, attributes, and behavior may be represented in any manner in the perceived risk-free environment of online spaces. This permits individuals to act out their personal fantasies without apparent consequences.

Online screen names and profiles permit us to self-represent ourselves in a particular manner that is often far from reality. Social media permits us to define facets of self with mere images and a few characters.

Meanwhile, gender fluidity is being promoted as a cultural norm. Individuals may now self-identify as someone or something else. Bookstores and blogs are rampant with self-help, self-awareness, and self-actualization topics. Tattoos have moved from expressing identity to defining identity.

Advances in artificial intelligence are rapidly colliding with concepts of identity and personhood. TED Talks provide unending lectures on personality, self-motivation, and humanity — all with the goal to assist us in defining our identity.

Editor's note: According to ted.com, "TED [Technology, Entertainment, and Design] is a global community, welcoming people from every discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world... TED is owned by a nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation. Our agenda is to make great ideas accessible and spark conversation."

The 1978 rock music classic, Who Are You, by The Who is the siren lament of contemporary culture. Culture has more adjectival labels for people now than one's favorite cup of coffee at the boutique coffee shop. People are in an identity crisis, desperately trying to define themselves in a world that strangles uniqueness as it makes everything normative.

We, believers, have the answer. Our identity is not defined by a denomination or a church. It is not defined by what coffee we drink, what clothes we wear, the politi-



Guest opinion
with Charles Patrick

cal party with which we align, whether we use an iOS or Android phone, which sports team for which we root, which blogs we read, or whether or not we have a beard.

Rather, the Apostle Paul clearly and succinctly defines our identity with the two-word prepositional phrase, "in Christ." He repeatedly uses this expression in his epistles (along with "in Him" and "in the Lord"), and it is critical to Paul's and our theology. Our identity is a Gospel identity fully defined in Christ.

To be in Christ means we share in Jesus' death and resurrection. The old us is dead and we are new creatures placed under the headship of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1-2). Hence, our identity has been changed, and we think and act differently.

We are adopted into the family of God (1 Corinthians 12:13). Having been justified, we are able to come boldly before the throne of God (Ephesians 2:13; Hebrews 4:16) as a people set apart (1 Peter 2:9).

Our identity comes with citizenship in heaven as we are changed to be in the world and not of the world (John 17:14-16; Romans 12:2).

Our identity does not depend on us or material things of this world, but solely on Christ. We are united with Christ and are His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20).

So, the next time someone asks who you are, answer them with "in Christ." When they look at you strangely, begin a Gospel proclamation.

Patrick is vice president for strategic initiatives and communications at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth. This column first appeared in the seminary's Theological Matters blog, (theologicalmatters.com.) and appears here courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for style.

THE Baptist Record

Editor
William H. Perkins Jr.
wperkins@mbcb.org

Associate Editor
Tony Martin
tmartin@mbcb.org

Layout/Design
Megan Young
myoung@mbcb.org

Advertising
Dana Richardson
drichardson@mbcb.org

Circulation Manager
DeAnna Burgess
dburgess@mbcb.org

Baptist Record
Advisory Committee:
Whit Lewis, New Albany
Demick Wilson, Kosciusko
Carolyn Reeves, Oxford
Garland Boyd, Brookhaven
Lucy Stricker, Foxworth
Don Hicks, Bay Springs

Postmaster:
Send changes of
address to: The Baptist
Record, P.O. Box 530,
Jackson, MS
39205-0530.

Send news,
communication,
and address changes
to: The Editor, Baptist
Record, P.O. Box 530,
Jackson, MS
39205-0530.

Tel: (601) 968-3800
Fax: (601) 292-3330
E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org



VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 48 • ISSN 0005-5778

Published weekly except weeks of July 4 and Christmas by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 515 Mississippi Street, Jackson, MS 39201. Subscription \$11.99 per year payable in advance. Economy plans available for cooperating Mississippi churches. Periodicals postage paid at Jackson, MS. Member, Association of State Baptist Papers. Deadlines: News items — one calendar week prior to requested publication date. Advertising — two calendar weeks prior to requested publication date. All submissions are subject to editing.

Movie ratings in U.S. mark 50 years, but critics unimpressed

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP) — The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) last week celebrated the 50th birthday of the national movie rating scale, which started as an attempt to ward off censors and became a part of the collective consciousness of U.S. moviegoers.

The organization released survey results showing that 91% of American parents were familiar or very familiar with the G, PG, PG-13, R, and NC-17 classification system, and 95% thought it was helpful.

"We could point to many factors behind the ratings' success," MPAA CEO Charles Rivkin wrote in an open letter, "but the clearest one of all comes directly from its founding mission: to maintain the trust and confidence of American parents."

The MPAA proposed the system in part to quell calls for government censorship of movies. Before 1968, the MPAA issued a set of censor-friendly guidelines for all films. The rules forbade things like blasphemy, obscenity, nudity, and sympathetic portrayals of criminals, but the code was hard to maintain as societal tolerance of immorality increased so MPAA founder Jack Valenti came up with the rating system, which took the pressure off filmmakers to produce family-friendly content and put the responsibility on moviegoers to police what they watched.

By basing the rating scale entirely on whether the content was age-appropriate for children, the MPAA set a new norm that, as conservative filmmaker David Stidham put it, "morality is only for people under 10."

"If you are 18 or over, or if

you have no children, the rating system has no meaning for you," Valenti, who died in 2007, once wrote on the MPAA website.

While the rating system is almost universally known, it's not universally loved by parents. On the MPAA parent survey, 84% of respondents said the ratings were accurate but only 71% thought every movie they saw in the past year was rated appropriately.

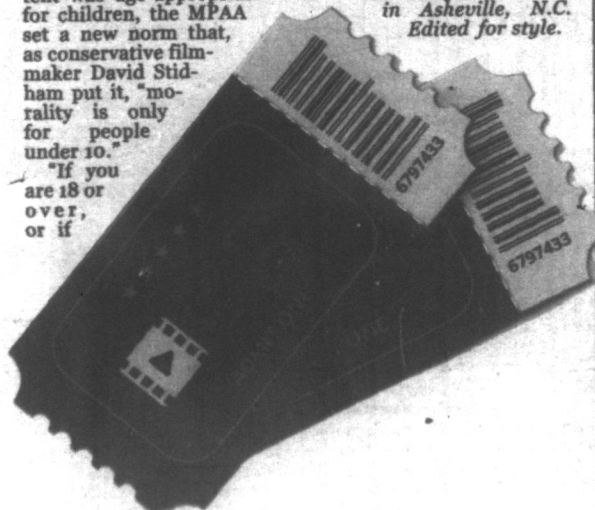
A 2011 study of movie ratings over the years found some evidence of "ratings creep," with PG-13 movies becoming increasingly violent.

The somewhat arbitrary nature of the ratings also contributes to parents' frustration. PG movies can have "some profanity and some depictions of violence or brief nudity" but no depictions of drug use, according to MPAA rules.

PG-13 movies are only supposed to have one instance of "harsher sexually derived words," but since the 1980s numerous films in that category have sneaked in more than one F-bomb. The word even appeared in the PG movie "Big" in 1988.

The MPAA noted that in the past 50 years, about 58% of movies received an R rating, but that statistic belies the box office dominance of PG-13 movies. Since 2011, PG-13 movies have accounted for 12 or more of the top 25 U.S. films by ticket sales each year.

Used by permission of WORLD Digital, a division of WORLD Magazine (www.worldmag.com) based in Asheville, N.C. Edited for style.



TOWNSEND

WMU lays bricks to remember their special women leaders

JACKSON, Ms. (Special and local reports) — When Cindy Townsend joined the staff of First Church, Jackson, a year ago, she found something that surprised her.

"I pulled a banner out of the closet that showed when our Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) organization began at the church, and it had a date on it that was before national WMU's founding in 1888. That prompted me to go back into the history," said Townsend, who serves as the church's minister of WMU and women's enrichment activities.

First Church, Jackson, is believed to be only church in the Southern Baptist Convention that has a full-time WMU director on the local staff.

"We had some trailblazing women in our church," she said. "To say that WMU and missions is the DNA of our church is an understatement. These women laid a strong foundation for us."

Eight more trailblazing women have led that effort over the years — the eight women who served in Townsend's position before her.

"They've held the missions banner high," she pointed out.

On behalf of First Church, Townsend recently purchased eight bricks for WMU's new Walk of Faith garden to honor those eight women. The Walk of Faith, to be built on New Hope Mountain in Birmingham where WMU headquarters is located, will honor missions heroes past and present.

For some, that means Girls in Action leaders who first in-

troduced the youngsters to missions. For others, that might be a grandmother who taught them that the world needed to hear about the love of Jesus.

One hundred percent of the funds from the bricks will go to the Wanda Lee Joy Fund to meet WMU's operational needs. So far, WMU Foundation has sold 190 bricks, raising \$59,500 for WMU.

There's no end date for the project. As long as people would like to buy the bricks, WMU Foundation will continue to lay them in the Walk of Faith.

David George, president of WMU Foundation, said the walk will support the ministry of WMU into the future and honor the unsung missions heroes and mentors that have impacted so many.

"It's in the DNA of people within WMU to want to honor the people who got them involved," he said. "Talk to people who are involved in WMU, and they will all point to someone who saw something in them when they were little girls and young women and got them involved. What a great way to honor that tradition."

Townsend said for her, purchasing the bricks was a way to honor the women at First Church who have poured their lives into passing a love for missions on to others. From G.A. Carothers who began serving in 1933 to Kasey Shackelford who left in 2017, "they're all just incredible, incredible women," Townsend said.

"I have a heart for missions today because of the investment of

REMEMBERED —

The late Betty Malone and the late Mable Odle, both former Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) directors at First Church, Jackson, are memorialized on the Walk of Faith garden pathway at national WMU headquarters in Birmingham, Al (Photos courtesy of national WMU)

these women," she noted. "They had a passion for passing that education on to others."

One of those women, Betty Malone, passed away in October after spending her life encouraging others to get involved in missions.

"She loved every nation of the world, she prayed for them, and she sent people on mission. She touched generations in her impact for Christ," Townsend said of Malone, who served in the WMU director position at First Baptist from 1985-1991.

Malone had been there at a strategic point in time, Townsend said. "She had the ear of the men as well as the women and whenever the men would want to get something done, she would say with a twinkle in her eye and a big smile, 'Now if you really want something done in the church, get the WMU to do it. They are the ones who pray and rally people to give and participate.'"

She was a trailblazer who impacted many, Townsend said. "She was passionate about the ends of the earth."

Mable Odle, the church's WMU director from 1957-59, was the wife of the late Joe Odle, longtime Mississippi Baptist pastor and editor of The Baptist Record from 1959-76.

Anyone interested in honoring missions heroes in their lives can order bricks through the WMU Foundation. The bricks come in a regular and large size and will be part of the walkway in the garden.

For more information or to purchase a brick, visit wmufoundation.com/walkoffaith.

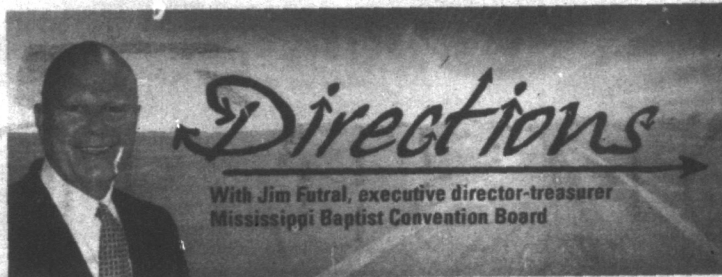
Thanks to the folks at Oxford Dictionaries, we are told the Word of the Year in 2018 is "toxic." According to those folks, toxic was used over 40% more in 2018 than in the years before. They keep up with such things, in part because it's their job and, I suppose, so they can keep us informed as to the highly-used words in our culture. If you think about it, toxic was everywhere this year. There were discussions about toxic masculinity and toxic politics and toxic conversations and toxic environments. Toxic made its way into every area of life.

Toxic has been around a good while already. In fact, for years toxic has been called to our attention about things in our own households. Things that we need to get rid of because they are toxic. You can look up lists of toxic things that may be in your house. Things such as non-stick cookware, flea and tick products, mothballs, air fresheners, furniture polishes, oven cleaners, washing products. All may have the possibility of being toxic.

The evolution of washing machine products is interesting. Do you remember when you could just buy a box of soap that would be used to wash your clothes? Slowly it has changed into fancy little pods, some of them looking like they just came off the cookie shelf. You put these pods in the washing machine with your clothes, and the wrappings dissolve and the cleaner is dispensed.

One of the big problems with that is it does look like candy or cookies or something that would be really attractive to a youngster who would grab it and put it in his or her mouth not knowing that it could be toxic.

As a result of it being toxic and attractive to little people, the cleaning product folks started packaging it in childproof canisters and putting warning labels on it and giving advice in advertisements to be careful and that it could harm your child. Toxic things are around us everywhere, not just in cleaning products and poison air but maybe far more harmful as we express them and show them and impact oth-



The Word of the Year '18

ers unknowingly. Let me give you a quick list of ABCD's of toxic stuff.

A - Attitude. Our attitudes affect people around us. Attitudes can be hurtful and harmful and at best just unpleasant. I was checking out at a store recently and the woman at the cash register was obviously not particularly happy. I spoke to her and she mumbled something. As she was taking care of my purchase, I said, "Are you having a tough day?" That was the open door for her to unload on me how she felt about her boss lady. She was rather loud in her expressions and clear in her feelings about the boss. I didn't know who the manager of the store was, but I saw a woman standing 20 or 30 feet back in the store. I thought maybe that was the person she was talking about. I asked, "Is the lady back there your manager?" She said to me, "No, she left about an hour ago and probably won't be back the rest of the day." I said, "Oh." I thought the person she was actually angry toward had left the premises. Probably had gone home and was enjoying life, but the attitude she had toward her boss was going to be spilled out on everybody who came through the checkout counter, at least for an hour, maybe for the rest of the day. Our attitudes are that way. They get ahold of us more than they affect the person toward

whom they are projected. Having a good attitude or a bad attitude is a decision we will make, not just something that somebody does to us. It can be toxic.

B - Beliefs. Time and space will not allow me to talk about all the important beliefs in our lives related to God, His Word, and our relationship to Christ Jesus, but what we believe is important, infectious, or it can be hurtful. There are wrong beliefs, bad beliefs, hurtful beliefs, ungodly beliefs that some people project, but maybe none more destructive than when parents say, "I don't believe in influencing my child about what they ought to believe. I think they ought to just grow up and make decisions on their own." Really? The strange thing about that is that it only applies to a relationship to God and to His Son, Jesus. Otherwise, we want to influence our children's beliefs: how they feel about certain people, how they feel about certain sports, how they feel about certain events. We influence them about that and just let them grow up harum-scarum, choosing whatever they want to believe about God. How foolish. How unwise. Beliefs ultimately shape everything about us. How we treat people. What we believe about our own life. What we believe about eternity. What we believe about

the here and now. Wrong beliefs can certainly be toxic for a lifetime.

C - Communication. Hardly a day goes by and maybe a day doesn't even barely begin without hearing some communication that is toxic, laced with vile, hurtful words and insinuations. Communication can be a terrible thing. The writer of Proverbs says that the power of life and death is in the tongue (Prov. 18:21). The wise man is talking about communication. You can hurt your children and damage their lives and their futures by crude, hurtful communication to them and toward them.

D - Discouragement. Discouragement can be highly toxic, and sadly there are many people who may touch our lives, maybe work around us, teach us, influence us, who discourage us constantly. There are some people who seem to have the gift of discouragement. Don't you be one of them. I so often think about the day that after Moses had passed away and God put the mantle of leadership on Joshua, how easy it would be for people to discourage him. The new leader of Israel, the new leader leading them into the Promise Land, and God repeatedly said in chapter one of the book of Joshua - be strong and of good courage. Do not be discouraged (Josh. 1:9). Can you imagine someone coming up and saying, "Who do you think you are, Joshua? Do you think you are Moses?" No, he wasn't Moses. He was Joshua, and he was God's leader. Discouragement can harm and hurt and sometimes thwart the work and the will of God. It's toxic.

Pause for a moment and allow God to help you take inventory of toxic things that may have found a resting place in our own hearts, our own attitudes, our own mouths. Ask Him to come and give us the kinds of things that will help the people around us and, in turn, help us. Maybe next year and the years ahead will not be filled with toxic things. At least, in the small arena where you and I exist.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

BIBL iO C i P H E R

ZRYXOSY, QGUO WCXV TVWS YO-

SURCX Y XBRX KBGNB GY, FWYX RCM

OHWRE; DCVKGCQ XBRX TO REYV

BRUO R ZRYXOS GC BORUOC.

NVEVYGR CY PWWS: VCO

Clue: B = H

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Luke 4:4

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically

via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the

HOUSE TOPS.

Matthew 10:27 NAS

December 6, 2018

HouseTops is a Baptist Record supplement produced by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board's Communication Services.

2018 YOUTH EVANGELISM CHALLENGE

NOW IS THE TIME

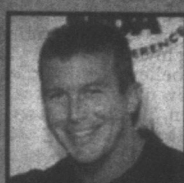
DECEMBER 27-28, 2018 • MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE



JASON CURRY
Speaker



BROKEN VESSELS
Music



TEDDY DIBIASE
Speaker

Preregister at tinyurl.com/2018YEC (\$10) or at the door (\$15).
Contact the Evangelism Dept. at lbarris@mbcb.org for additional info.

A CHRISTIAN LIFE STYLE

MAKE YOUR WILL MONTH

Looking for a resolution you can keep?

January is "Make Your Will" month
The Mississippi Baptist Foundation can help you make this the year you follow through

Call 601.292.3210
or visit us on the web at msbaptistfoundation.org

MBF

Then → now ↗

January is "Make Your Will" month!

Contact the Mississippi Baptist Foundation today to schedule a Legacy Conversation for your church in January. Representatives are available to share in Sunday services and midweek gatherings such as WMU, Brotherhood, senior adults and boomers fellowships. Learn more about what may be the greatest stewardship opportunity of your life — appropriating your estate resources (your "stuff") through your Last Will and Testament.

www.msbaptistfoundation.org • 601-292-3210 • foundation@mbcb.org

REPLICATE MINISTRIES: D-GROUP TRAINING

COST: \$25 including lunch

REGISTRATION: www.tinyurl.com/dgrouptrain by January 25, 2019.



LOCATIONS

TIME: 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
(Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.)

FEBRUARY 11
Harrisburg Baptist Church
Tupelo, MS

FEBRUARY 12
First Baptist Church
Clinton, MS

FEBRUARY 13
First Baptist Church
Gulfport, MS

Contact the Discipleship and Family Ministry Department at 601-292-3284 or e-mail tpresson@mbcb.org for more information.

Called to Serve

STATE EVANGELISM CONFERENCE
January 27-28, 2019
Country Woods Baptist Church • Byram, MS

"Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing."
 Psalm 100:2



Contact the Evangelism Department at lburns@mbcb.org or
 call 601-292-3278 for more information.



MARCH 2, 2019

Beginning Ringers Handbell Festival
 Garaywa Camp and Conference Center, Clinton

MARCH 22-23, 2019

Mississippi Baptist Handbell Festival
 First Baptist Church, Pyram

MARCH 29-30, 2019

Mississippi Baptist Handbell Festival
 North Greenwood Baptist Church, Greenwood

Contact Church Music at cwtaylor@mbcb.org or
 601-292-3267 for more information.

PASTOR/LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Are you a minister seeking God's will about
 a position of service?

Are you a church seeking God's will about
 a new pastor or minister?

Contact the Pastor/Leadership Development Department
 at elindigrin@mbcb.org for more information.



CALLING ALL ENTRIES!

Does your church produce videos?
 Does your church have a website?
 Do you type words on the screen for
 worship service?

If you answered YES to any of these
 questions, then you have material you can
 enter into the 2019 Witnessing Through Media
 Awards Competition!

— Awards Competition —

- Entries in the Awards Competition must
 have been produced or aired between
 January 1, 2018 – January 1, 2019.
- Award Entry Deadline is February 15, 2019.

For more information, contact Communication Services
 at 601-292-3378 or e-mail richardson@mbcb.org

LEAD YOUR CONGREGATION to FREEDOM *in Christ*

FINANCIAL *Peace*
UNIVERSITY

78% of Americans live
paycheck to paycheck.

12% of born-again
Christians title.

Money is the #1 issue
married couples argue about.

For more information, contact
the Stewardship Department at
leavell@mbcb.org.



DISCERN RETREAT

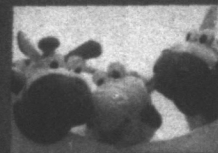
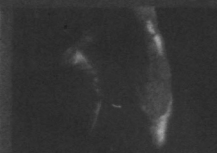
January 4-5, 2019
Garaywa Camp & Conference Center
Patterson Place • Clinton, MS

Contact Discipleship and Family Ministry at tpresson@mbcb.org
for more information.

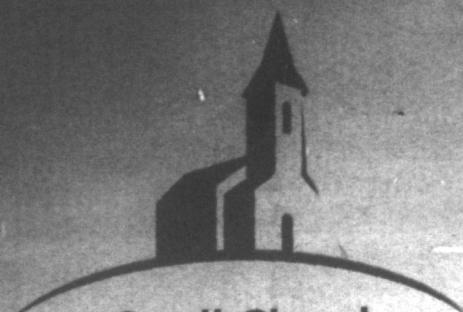
MCCAF MISSISSIPPI CHRISTIAN CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL

February 22-23, 2019

Brandon Baptist Church | Brandon, MS



Contact Discipleship & Family Ministry at redwards@mbcb.org
for more information.



Small Church Youth Ministry Workshops

6:00-8:45 p.m.
Supper is served at 6:00 p.m.

Thursday, January 10
East Heights Baptist Church
205 Lake St. | Tupelo, MS 38804

Thursday, February 7
County Line Baptist Church
3765 Highway 29 S. | Overt, MS 39464

Thursday, February 28
Pine Grove Baptist Church
6690 Hwy. 5 | Hickory Flat, MS 38633

Contact Discipleship & Family Ministry at
tpresson@mbcb.org for more info.
To register, visit
www.tinyurl.com/2019SmallChurch.

Every church.

Every nation.

LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING
for international missions

Sponsored by the Woman's Missionary Union.
Contact Rebekah Parker at 601-292-3316 for more information.

2019 STATE SENIOR ADULT EVANGELISM RALLY

Country Woods Baptist Church | Byram, MS
Tuesday, January 29



Brothers 4 Quartet



Mickey Bounds

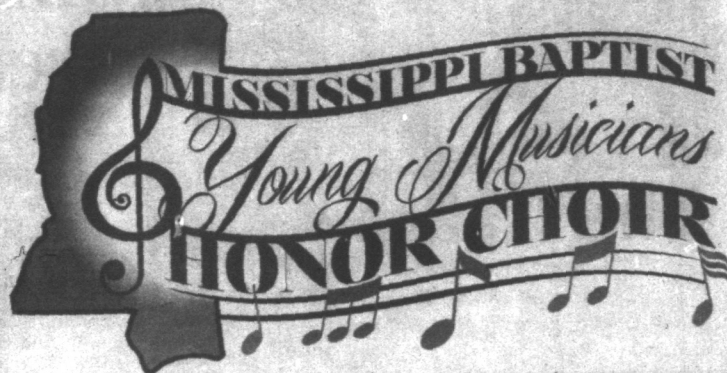


Dennis Swanberg



Voices of Joy

No fee or registration required. For questions or more information, contact
Discipleship and Family Ministry at 601-292-3284 or tpresson@mbcb.org.



APRIL 6-7, 2019

Emmanuel Baptist Church
245 Meadowbrook Road
Grenada, MS 38901

Contact Church Music at 601-292-3272 or Wyndy South at
wsouth@mbcb.org for additional information.

MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST

*Symphony
Orchestra*

MADISON CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL
Band Hall

Friday, January 11
6:30-9:00 p.m.

Saturday, January 12
8:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Contact Church Music at cwtaylor@mbcb.org or 601-292-3267
for more information.



Miss Alessia V. Worthy
2/2/07
Parents: Charlie & Shannon
European Peoples

Mr. Haddon Bledsoe
2/16/01
Parents: David & Laurie
American Peoples

Miss Allie
2/19/15
Parents: J & M
Restricted

Restricted: China

To Be Sent January 24, 2019, by the WMU Office



PLEASE NOTE THE TIMING: Thank you for your love and support of MKs by sending Birthday cards! Because of the sending to other countries, there is a need to get cards sent a month ahead of birthday. As soon as the list is in the Baptist Record, please send the cards and not wait until a couple of weeks before the date of the birthday. It is passed two months ahead to give time to receive cards and then to mail them a month ahead of time to it, sure arrival around birthday. Again, thank you for being a blessing to so many with this ministry!

NOTE: Church members may send a package of cards together; cards do not have to be sent individually to the WMU. Individual cards do not need postage stamps when sent as a package to MS WMU.

FOR SECURITY: Cards will be forwarded. Please send all to: MBCE WMU MK Birthdays, PO Box 530, Jackson MS 39205.

Please include your return address on each card envelope. MKs and their parents may wish to send you an update or note of appreciation.

HOUSE TOPS



Doors open
@ 5 p.m.

Concert
@ 6 p.m.

\$20 General
Admission

Tickets available at

North Greenwood
Baptist Church

615 Grand Boulevard
662-453-2801

The Isaacs

Christmas Concert
December 16, 2018
North Greenwood Baptist Church

CLASSIFIEDS

EXPERIENCED PASTOR SEEKING PULPIT SUPPLY/INTERIM IN NORTH OR NORTH-EAST MS AREA. Call 662-871-8913.

SALE: ALLEN CHURCH ORGAN Model 505 2 Manuals Full Pedalboard and 4 speakers Please contact Rhonda Fleming at 601-433-6252. Located in Ellisville, MS Asking \$3000. Will need to pick up. Very Good Condition Will consider negotiating on price.

STAINED GLASSWORKS, INC. SERVING MS & AL since 1992. Call 800-605-2970.

GET THE BEST RATES ON: Health Insurance and Medicare Supplements. Call 1-800-541-8196 or visit www.TurnerInsuranceOnline.com.

CHURCH PEW UPHOLSTERY, FREE ESTIMATES: Davis Upholstery, Gulfman, Miss., phone 601-776-6617.

HEIDELBERG STAINED GLASS, ME-RIDIAN DESIGN, FABRICATION, REPAIR. Heidelbergstainedglass.com or call wk 601-483-7958 or cell 601-616-1390.

WWW.SEBRENHOMEIMPROVEMENT.COM. Christian owned Don & Rita Sebrn. 601-992-2092. All home improvements, siding, energy efficient windows, metal & shingle roofs, screen & sunrooms, patio covers, decks, room additions, kitchen & bath upgrades.

WINDOW AND SCREEN SHOP — windows and storm windows built to fit your opening. Plus new window screens and rescreen old screens. Call Tom Cook 601-709-4879.

NORRIS BOOKBINDING COMPANY, INC., OLD BIBLES REBOUND. Also, church bulletins and hymnals. For more information call 662-453-7424 or fax us at 662-455-6743.

HAMBURG FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IS PRAYERFULLY SEEKING A FULL-TIME PASTOR. Please send resume to First Baptist Church Pastor Search Committee, 203 E. Parker St., Hamburg, AR 71646 or email to fbchbg.office@gmail.com. For more information you may call the church office at 870-853-5520.

HOPPER STAINED GLASS: Custom windows, restoration and repairs, safety and insulated glass, custom aluminum and wood frames. Statewide 601-502-0202, www.hopperglass.net.

PULPIT SUPPLY AVAILABLE: Retired Southern Baptist Navy chaplain available for Sunday pulpit supply on short notice (pastor illness, vacation, rest, etc.). 100 mile radius of Hattiesburg. Deacon of Hardy Street Baptist Church. Graduate of New Orleans Baptist and Fuller Theological Seminaries. References available. Compensation unimportant. Contact him at 601-408-4608 or bennyhomsby.com.

MS POSITIONS

PALESTINE BAPTIST CHURCH IN NETTLETON, MS, IS IN SEARCH OF A PASTOR. If you are interested, please submit a resume to Palestine Baptist Church, Attn: Pastor Search Committee, 730 Road 598, Nettleton, MS 38858 or email to housleytewer@gmail.com.

SEEKING A FULL-TIME PASTOR — WEST SALEM BAPTIST CHURCH. Located east of Richton, MS in the northern part of Greene County. Please email resumes to WestSalemBaptistChurch@gmail.com.

PARKWAY BAPTIST CHURCH, HOUSTON, MS, IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER. Please email resume to the search committee at randyrinehart63@gmail.com.

IMMANUEL BAPTIST OF VICKSBURG IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR/YOUTH MINISTER. Please email resumes to mbull12@yahoo.com or mail to IBC Personnel Committee at 6949 Hwy 61 South, Vicksburg, MS 39180.

MEADOWVIEW BAPTIST CHURCH/STARKVILLE MS IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME MINISTER OF YOUTH: Basic requirements include a minimum of an associate's degree and two years related ministerial experience/training. Resumes may be submitted to info@mbcstark.com or mailed to 300 Linden Circle, Starkville, MS 39759. For information call 662-769-4188 or visit <http://mbcstark.com/>

COUNTY LINE BAPTIST CHURCH, SOUTHERN JONES COUNTY, MS, IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME PASTOR. Send resumes to Billy Sanders, 1779 Ovelt-Petal Rd., Ovelt, MS 39484, or email to annsparker@gmail.com

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH OF MERIDIAN, MS IS SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC. Our Worship Services are a Blend of contemporary and traditional music. Interested parties should send a resume to cbcfm1@comcast.net. For More Information Call: Sharon Seal @ 601-483-5432.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LONG BEACH IS RECEIVING RESUMES FOR A FULL-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC. Send resumes to fbcbsearchcommittee@gmail.com or First Baptist Church Long Beach Attn: Music Search Committee 300 North Cleveland Avenue Long Beach, MS 39560.

NEW PROSPECT BAPTIST CHURCH, OLIVE BRANCH, MS IS SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL MUSIC DIRECTOR. Please email resume to rourts@newprospect.net.

DREW BAPTIST CHURCH IS SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR — Please email resume to drewbaptistchurch@gmail.com or U.S. mail to Drew Baptist Church, 139 S Church St., Drew, MS 38737.

SEEKING A FULL-TIME PASTOR — BETHANY BAPTIST CHURCH. Located at Meridian, MS in the Wynot community of Southern Lauderdale County. Please email resume to office@whynotbethany.org or mail to Bethany Baptist Church, 4475 Ponds Road, Meridian, MS 39301.

FULL-TIME WORSHIP LEADER EXPERIENCED IN CHORAL CONDUCTING FOR SLAYDEN BAPTIST CHURCH. Send resume to Search Committee jstrahan@slaydenbaptist.com or mail to Search Committee, Slayden Baptist Church, 2534 Hwy 72, Lamar, MS. 38642

Small church follows big dream for missionaries

ANDERSONVILLE, Tn. (IMB) — A few years ago, Steve Lakin's church budget had a line of numbers his heart couldn't reconcile.

"I was meeting with the elder leadership here at the church, and as I was looking through our financial report, I saw we had a large surplus left over," said Steve, pastor of First Church, Andersonville, Tn.

One of the elders smiled and said he was sure God had ways in mind to spend that money. Steve agreed. "That

thought just kept reverberating in my head for the next several days," he said.

As it did, those extra dollars fueled big dreams, dreams that didn't end with that year's surplus. The little church of 125 decided to step out and commit to something radical and raise money equivalent to what it takes to fund the work of one missionary couple under Southern Baptists' International Mission Board (IMB) — not just for that year but for years to come.

"We got in touch with the IMB and shared what was on our heart, and they connected us with a couple who was getting ready to go the field who could be the 'face' of the need for us," Steve said.

In the past, First Church had given generously to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions (LMCO), faithfully passing the \$10,000 mark every year. In the year of the surplus, the church took an additional \$90,000 out of its budget to "adopt" Kyle and Amber Wilkens (not their real names), IMB missionaries to East Asia.

In the years since, the church has set aside one Sunday as "Sacrificial Sunday," the day the congregation raises the entire \$90,000 to give IMB with the Wilkens' costs in mind.

"Every year without fail, we've either gotten the \$90,000 or gone above it," Steve said. "We became motivated and moved to give radically to see the advancement of the Gospel, and we began to see giving generously as our responsibility."

As a result, the church saw God do phenomenal things, he reported. "We're just a small church; we're not huge," Steve pointed out. "We may be a 'First Baptist,' but Andersonville is a small town. God can take small things and do great things with them, and through our giving to the IMB, we see how God is using us."

It's caused a cultural shift, he said. Through that direct connection to the Wilkens, missions has come alive. The church already knew their gifts mattered, but their extra effort put faces to the money they sent to IMB and now the congregation prays specifically, sends care packages, and actively goes on mission too, Steve said.

"It has dramatically changed our view of the Gospel and the way we see missions," explained Steve. "People sometimes say, 'It can't be done in our church,' but if God can do this with us then he can do it with you."

Pray for:

■ Churches to envision how their gifts to LMCO directly power the Gospel going out to unreached people groups.

■ More and more congregations to rise up as sacrificial supporters.

This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions in the Southern Baptist Convention is Dec. 2-9 with the theme, Every Church. Every Nation. The theme undergirds the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. This year's goal is \$160 million.

"Hearing is Believing"

For a FREE consultation call
Jackson 1-800-844-1200 or Hattiesburg 1-800-844-5821
or go online at www.audioservices.org

Professional Sound
System Design and
Installation
Church / School / Commercial

audio SERVICES
A DIVISION OF MISSISSIPPI MUSIC INCORPORATED

Need a light?

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

THE VILLAGE VIEW



Sean A. Milner, Executive Director
P.O. Box 27
Clinton, MS 39060-0027
(601) 922-2242
www.baptistchildrensvillage.com

GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is lovingly designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

NOVEMBER 1-15

MEMORIALS

Mr. Robert Thomas
Mr. & Mrs. Curtis A. Buchanan
Mr. Bill Tolleson
Mrs. Cheryl G. Case
Mrs. Dorothy Nell Weekley
Mr. & Mrs. Connley Monk

NOVEMBER 16-30

HONORS

Mr. & Mrs. Richard (Becky) Avant
Nay B. Reed
Ms. Vickie Cothorn
Mrs. Mattie Rials
Mr. & Mrs. Will Dodds
Mr. & Mrs. Johnie A. Hudson
Mr. Allen Goodin
Ms. Patricia Triplett
Mr. & Mrs. Curt (Shannon) Jones
Mr. & Mrs. James E. Clark
Jean H. McLendon
Mr. & Mrs. Jim Rushing
Mrs. Scotty Peden
The Fred Blackledge Family
Ms. Jean W. Polk
Mr. & Mrs. Tripp Thomas
Mr. Claiborne Trawick
The Fred Blackledge Family
Ms. Carol Watts
Mr. & Mrs. James E. Clark
Mr. & Mrs. Jeff (Denise) Webb
Mr. & Mrs. James E. Clark
Judy H. Wesley
Mr. & Mrs. Jim Rushing

NOVEMBER 16-30

MEMORIALS

Ms. Billie Allred
Mr. & Mrs. Barney J. Albritton
Mrs. Nancy "Tillie" Ashley
Mrs. Alyene Johns
Ms. Darlene Carr
Ms. Nell Ashley
Mr. & Mrs. Mike Goff
Mrs. Francis Blackmon
Rev. William B. Webb
Mr. Jimmy Lee Braxton
Valley Park BC
Mr. Mac Campbell
Mr. John M. Campbell
Mr. Harry Collins
Mr. & Mrs. Curtis A. Buchanan
Mrs. Mary June Cooksey
Dr. & Mrs. Randy Easterling
Ms. Chris King Currie
Mr. & Mrs. Barney J. Albritton
Mr. Milton Deer
Mr. & Mrs. Barney J. Albritton
Mr. Don Dunn
Mr. & Mrs. Arthur E. Bishop
Mr. Clyde Edwards
Mr. & Mrs. Curtis A. Buchanan
Mr. Ricky Ferguson
Mr. & Mrs. Jim Brents
Mr. Jim Finnegan
Mrs. Sheila Huffman
Mr. James Kenneth Fuller
Mrs. Barbara H. Fuller
Mr. Gregory Stephen Galloway
Mr. & Mrs. Vaughn Galloway
Mr. Ray Handley
Mrs. Allen Loper
Mr. David Henry
Mr. & Mrs. Curtis A. Buchanan
Mr. & Mrs. Jimmy Bruton



► Nola Baptist Church sponsored a bonfire & wiener roast with s'mores for residents and staff at Dickerson Place Campus. They also played games with the kids, as well as, had a praise music time and a devotional. It was a very warm, worshipful time together.



► Mississippi Wildlife Turkey Federation again donated 16 Thanksgiving turkeys. Barry Biggers and his son, Brady delivered the turkeys just in time for Thanksgiving and are pictured with Chrystelle Thames, BCV Director of Public Relations.

AUSTIN'S SHOES

Est. 1995

Thank you to Steve and Allana McElwain of Austin's Shoes in Oxford & Corinth, Mississippi for their special promotion this football season to benefit The Baptist Children's Village. For every field goal at the Ole Miss home football games \$300 in product was donated which resulted in \$2100 worth of shoes for BCV children. We are very thankful to the McElwain's for this generous gift! www.austinsshoes.com

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Merry Christmas from all The Baptist Children's Village staff and residents. We are very thankful for you and how God uses you in the lives of at-risk Mississippi children and families. You are a tremendous gift to our ministry and we wish you and yours a very blessed Christmas season.

"Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!"

2 CORINTHIANS 9:15 NIV

Not Alone • Genesis 28:10-22

Have you ever departed on a long journey by yourself? The sense of loneliness can seem overwhelming. Today's session focuses on an episode in Jacob's life when he found himself alone, on the run, and in a strange place. God chose those circumstances to reveal His purpose to Jacob.

Purpose Revealed (28:10-15)

Jacob left his home in Beersheba to go to Haran, a region at the apex of the Fertile Crescent. Jacob had to make the journey for two reasons. First, the lives of Isaac and Rebekah were embittered by Esau's pagan wives (Gen. 26:34-35), so they encouraged Jacob to return to the land of their fathers to find a wife (Gen. 27:46-28:9). Second, Esau, angered by Jacob's cunning in taking his birthright and his deception while stealing the blessing, wanted to kill his brother (Gen. 27:35-45). Jacob was fleeing for his life on a journey to find a wife.

We learn from Gen. 28:11-19 that Jacob traveled until sundown, stopping at a place called Luz (pronounced Lootz). The stone he used for a pillow might indicate how weary he was from his flight from Esau. According to Gen. 28:12-15, the LORD appeared to Jacob in a dream. The LORD confirmed His identity as the God of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob's grandfather and father respectively. He affirmed the promise of the land to Jacob and his descendants. He also

affirmed that Jacob's descendants would be like the dust of the earth for multitude, spreading out to all points of the compass. Of paramount importance, is the extension of God's blessings to the "families of the earth" through Jacob and his descendants (Gen. 28:14b; NASB). Finally, God also promised His presence with Jacob as He guided Isaac's younger son to the completion of His promises.

The Bible affirms in both Old and New

Testaments that God made Himself known through dreams. Today, believers have two things Jacob did not have: the indwelling Holy Spirit and the inspired Word of God. Anything God reveals in dreams today will be consistent with His written Word and the internal promptings of the Holy Spirit. Thus, believers can be confident in knowing that God is with them and guides them to fulfill His purposes for them.

Presence Realized (28:16-19)

When Jacob awoke from his dream,

he uttered words that would be echoed down through the centuries as generations of believers discovered after-the-fact that God had been with them all along. He proclaimed, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it" (Gen. 28:16). Jacob was struck with a sense of reverential fear for the place, calling it the "house of God" and the "gate of heaven" (28:17). He set up the stone, which had been his pillow the previous

night, as a sacred pillar, anointing it with oil. This action marked in a tangible way the spot as a special place. Jacob then

gave this place of the LORD's special revelation a new name, Bethel, meaning "the house of God" (28:18-19).

Believers can joyfully and gratefully commemorate God's working in their lives. My personal Bethel is a creek bank behind my parent's home in Virginia where God began to draw me as a teenager to Himself. No experience in life can match those moments when we realize

that we are in the presence of our Creator and Redeemer.

Commitment Made (28:20-22)

Having anointed the pillar or standing stone, Jacob made a vow of commitment to God. In essence, Jacob vowed to acknowledge the LORD as his God. This vow was a strong affirmation of faith. However, Jacob began the vow by saying "if," making the vow conditional. If God be will be with me, if God will keep me on this journey, if God will give me food and garments, if God will allow me to return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. What God had affirmed in the dream, Jacob conditionalized in his vow. In fairness to Jacob, his words could indicate a positive affirmation of God's promise or a resignation to the fact that only when Jacob returned to his father's house would God's promises be confirmed.

God reveals His plans to Christ-followers today through His written Word and through the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. When He does, believers are to take steps of faith in response to God's speaking to them. Firm commitments based on God's Word guide us.

VanHorn is Dean of the Mississippi College School of Christian Studies and the Arts.



Explore the Bible

with W. Wayne VanHorn

Joseph's Obedience • Matthew 1:18-25

The prophecies regarding the Messiah had been given down through the generations; then came silence for almost 400 years. It was the apostle Matthew who bridged the gap between the centuries, writing a detailed account identifying Jesus Christ as the One who fulfilled all of the prophecies (Matt. 1:1). The first 17 verses of Matthew 1 focus on the genealogy of Jesus through the lineage of Joseph, the Davidic line. "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way" (vs. 18a, ESV). This opens the focal passage for today's lesson. In eight simple verses, we hone in on the miraculous mystery of this event learning about a man who played a masterful role without saying a word.

Unlike engagements and weddings of today, the engagement/betrothal for a Jewish boy and girl took place around the ages of 12 to 15. When the couple was betrothed, it was considered a legally binding agreement, but the couple did not live together. Usually, the betrothal lasted a year. A dowry was paid by the prospective groom's family, gifts were given, and he would return to his home spending his time preparing a home for his bride, usually attached to his father's house. The bride-to-be prepared herself by faithfully waiting and staying pure. Then at the appropriate

time, the prospective groom would go and bring his bride-to-be to their new home where a wedding feast was held for seven days; then the marriage was consummated. Death or divorce was the only way out of the contract. During the year Joseph was planning and preparing for the day he would take Mary as his wife. That is until God disrupted his plan! "... before they came together she was found with child from the Holy Spirit."

Therefore, Joseph being a "just man", meaning upright and with integrity, "and being unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly" (vs. 19, see Deut. 24:1). In other words, he was strategizing, thinking about what would be the best course of action in this situation. What could and should he do as not to bring public exposure? Then, as he was deep in thought, an "angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife and the child... con-

ceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." The word dream means to have a vision while you are asleep.

While he was sleeping the angel of the Lord appeared to him and gave him God's solution to all the questions he had. First, he was not to fear to take Mary as his wife. The angel confirmed (see Luke 1:26-56) "for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." Then, one additional instruction

Joseph was to "call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Joseph was about to experience the amazing and abundant plan of God. Years later Jesus stated, "... I come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Salvation brings eternal abundant life! Then the angel of the Lord reminds Joseph of the words spoken by the prophet (Isa. 7:14) and the dream is over.

"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him

... The words which describe Joseph's life are, 'he did'. He simply obeyed. In a recently aired radio program entitled "Why Joseph", Pastor David Jeremiah said, "The forgotten man (Joseph) was spoken to, spoken about, but in all the passages we read about Joseph he never said a word." His actions spoke louder than any words. He did take Mary as his wife, he never knew her intimately until after the Child was born, and he named Him Jesus. Every time we read about Joseph we learn about his obedience. Joseph had three additional dreams and in each one, we see no words spoken by this man, only what 'he did' (Matt. 2:1-12; 16-18; 22-23). What faith! What obedience!

Pastor Jeremiah also stated, "Here was a man who was sensitive to the voice of God, strong but compassionate, and as we read about this adopted father's role in the life of Jesus, we see a man who willing steps back while God steps forward in His Son's life." Joseph chose obedience over what made sense to him and it changed his life.

What is the Lord asking you to change in your life this Christmas?

Leathers is a member of First Church, Madison.

Bible Studies for Life

with Laura Leathers



PEPPER

cont. from p. 1

my kids in Africa," she said, "but in a moment, God changed those fears and I had a complete peace that Africa was where we were supposed to be."

That peace followed her as she, Larry, and their three children left their home in Clear Lake, Texas, and moved to Ugan-

da for 12 years, then Lesotho for two years, and then Tanzania for eight more years.

Through the years, they have spent countless hours at the bedside of hurting people, leading them to the pages of the Bible and bringing them to lasting hope in Christ.

They have planted churches. They have disciplined university students. They have helped new mothers get on their feet and find

faith. They have started AIDS clinics. They have seen people find life, and they have buried the ones whom death has overcome.

Through it all they have seen God move in amazing ways, Larry said. The sense of the Father's loving sovereignty has never left them, from the early 1990s in Texas all the way to today.

"It doesn't make a whole lot of sense to use weak, sinful human beings in Kingdom work,

but that's what God does in our lives," Larry noted. "We have seen His faithfulness throughout all of these years as we've worked here. It has been humbling and incredible to watch."

Pray for:

■ Larry and Sally to maintain endurance in their medical ministry and have open doors to disciple the people they meet.

■ God to call out more workers to leave the United States and

serve among the unreached overseas. Pray for them to be sensitive to his leading and obedient to the call.

This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions in the Southern Baptist Convention is Dec. 2-9 with the theme, Every Church. Every Nation. The theme undergirds the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. This year's goal is \$160 million.

Greear: We pray, give, and go, because of promises

UKRAINE (IMB) — Imagine if you lived in Texas, and on a day's notice you had to leave and you ended up in Florida.

"All your belongings, your home, your job, your friends—they're back in Texas but you can't go back there because it's too dangerous," Russell Woodbridge said. "You have to start life all over again. Where is your hope? Where are you going to look for answers?"

That is the climate in Ukraine, where Russell serves as a missionary under the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention in Richmond, Va. He encounters people all the time who have fled their homes in the eastern part of the country when war broke out a few years ago.

In the midst of that heartbreak, he and other Ukrainian believers want to help those people find a hope that transcends the uncertainty of war.

"A year and a half ago, with the help of Ukrainians, we started a new church plant that specifically tries to reach these people who have been displaced and lost everything," Russell said. "We've seen people come to Christ and be baptized."

Through the seminary where Russell teaches, he's been able to mobilize displaced believers to plant churches among other displaced Ukrainians. He's even seen them plant churches beyond Ukraine's borders.

One student went to Central Asia and led people there to faith in Christ. Another planted a thriving church in Poland.

"This is what we're about: training Ukrainians to go with the Gospel to the nations," Russell said. "It's been a joy and a privilege for me to come alongside them."

Back in North Carolina, Russell's home church feels the same way about his work. J. D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, and president of the Southern Baptist Convention, says their partnership with Russell and his wife Ingrid encourages the church and enlarges their faith.

"We pray, we give, we go — not because we have to, but because of what God has promised He's going to do among the nations," J. D. said. "We get to have a front-row seat in what was formerly one of the most closed places in the world. It's our honor to be connected."

"We pray, we give, we go — not because we have to, but because of what God has promised He's going to do among the nations. We get to have a front-row seat in what was formerly one of the most closed places in the world. It's our honor to be connected."

J. D. Greear, Southern Baptist Convention president

That's the blessing of working alongside the IMB, he acknowledged. "Being a part of this great network of churches provides opportunities that maybe you couldn't do if you were by yourself. It helps us engage in ways that are meaningful and not just a flash in the pan."

That's the same whether your church is 50 or 5,000 strong, J.D. said, adding that regardless of size, churches "can be directly engaged in the exciting things God is doing in the most unreached places on the planet."

Russell agreed. "It takes all of us — American churches, IMB missionaries, and Ukrainian believers. It takes all of us working together to reach the nations for Christ."

Pray for:

■ Ukrainian believers to plant strong, healthy churches that spread rapidly among the lost in their country and beyond.

■ Churches to come alongside the work overseas and support them with prayer, funding, and volunteer help.

This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions in the Southern Baptist Convention is Dec. 2-9 with the theme, Every Church. Every Nation. The theme undergirds the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. This year's goal is \$160 million.

The offering, in tandem with Cooperative Program gifts from Southern Baptist churches, supports international workers in seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. Gifts to the Lottie Moon offering are received through local Southern Baptist churches or online at IMB.org/lmco, where there are resources to promote the offering.



MISSIONS IN UKRAINE — J.D. Greear (standing, right), pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., and president of the Southern Baptist Convention, talks with a congregation planted by Pastor Elisey Pronin (standing, left) made up of people who were displaced by the war in eastern Ukraine. The church offers the hope of Christ to people there who have lost everything. (IMB photo)

